

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 SSM-03 /072 W
-----051050Z 012995 /12

R 050856Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6004
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH POLLSTER HANOCH SMITH

REF: (A) TEL AVIV 2844 (B) TEL AVIV 2125

SUMMARY: MAARIV'S POLLSTER SEES HIGH VOTER INTEREST, DESPITE THE HUMDRUM CAMPAIGN. HE PREDICTS THAT THE ALIGNMENT WILL LOSE FEW, IF ANY, SEATS -- PRIMARILY BECAUSE THE OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE FAILED TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES AS CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVES. HE ALSO SEES THE SMALLER PARTIES IN THE CURRENT KNESSET EMERGING WEAKER, IF NOT WIPED OUT. END SUMMARY.

1. POLLSTER HANOCH SMITH WAS INVITED TO THE EMBASSY MAY 3 TO DISCUSS THE ELECTION OUTLOOK. SMITH, BORN AND RAISED IN THE US, HAS LIVED IN ISRAEL FOR 27 YEARS, HEADS AN INDEPENDENT CONSULTING FIRM IN THE FIELD OF MANPOWER PLANNING, AND DOES POLLING ON THE SIDE (AS A HOBBY). PREVIOUSLY, HE WAS DIRECTOR OF MANPOWER PLANNING IN THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MINISTRY OF LABOR. HE IS A HIGHLY QUALIFIED ELECTION ANALYST AND HAS BEEN COMMISSIONED BY MAARIV TO CONDUCT THREE SURVEYS DURING THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN, TWO OF WHICH HAVE BEEN ALREADY PUBLISHED (REFTELS). HIS THIRD AND LAST SURVEY HAS JUST BEGUN, WILL BE COMPLETED THIS WEEK, AND WILL APPEAR IN THE MAY 13 MAARIV.

2. SMITH HAS A GENERALLY LOW OPINION OF ISRAEL'S POLLS, INCLUDING PORI, BUT REGARDS THE YEDIOT AHARONOT POLL AS ONE OF THE BETTER ONE -- ALTHOUGH NOT AS GOOD AS HIS OWN. HE DESCRIBED AT LENGTH HIS SCIENTIFIC POLLING METHODOLOGY AND STATED THAT HIS 1973 POLLS WERE EXTREMELY CLOSE TO THE ELECTION RESULTS, WHEREAS MOST OF THE OTHERS WERE CONSIDERABLY OFF THE MARK.

3. HE SEES THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN AS DULL AND LISTLESS. NOT THAT THE VOTERS ARE APATHETIC; THEY ARE VERY MUCH ATTUNED AND DISCRIMINATING. HOWEVER, THE PARTIES ARE CONDUCTING A LACKLUSTER CAMPAIGN. HE ATTRIBUTES THIS, IN PART, TO BEGIN'S ILLNESS. UNLIKE PREVIOUS ELECTIONS, THERE HAS BEEN NO GIANT LIKUD RALLIES TO WHICH THE ALIGNMENT WOULD INEVITABLY RESPOND WITH ITS OWN. AS FOR THE DMC, SMITH DID NOT THINK YIGAEI YADIN KNOWS HOW TO CONDUCT A RALLY OR STIR A MASS AUDIENCE.

4. SMITH FINDS VOTER INTEREST VERY HIGH. OVER 90 PER CENT INTEND TO VOTE -- AS WAS THE CASE IN 1973; HOWEVER, ONLY SOME 78 PERCENT VOTED THEN. ACCORDING TO SMITH, AT LEAST HALF THE DIFFERENCE STEMS FROM THE POOR STATE OF THE VOTING REGISTERS; VOTERS WHO ARE TURNED AWAY AT THEIR POLLING PLACES SHOW ON THE RECORDS AS ABSTAINERS WHEN THAT WAS NOT THEIR INTENTION. MANY WHO HAVE MOVED IN THE LAST FEW YEARS WILL FIND THAT THE ELECTION ROLLS HAVE NOT CAUGHT UP WITH THEM.

5. SMITH SAID A FLOATING VOTE CHARACTERIZES ISRAEL'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POLITICAL CENTER, INCLUDING THE LIBERAL FACTION OF THE LIKUD. AMONG THE UNDECIDED VOTERS (SOME 24 PER CENT IN HIS APRIL POLL), HE FINDS THAT THE INDECISION IS GENERALLY BETWEEN THE ALIGNMENT AND THE DMC OR THE ALIGNMENT AND THE LIKUD. BUT HE ALSO NOTED THAT A FAIR AMOUNT OF DMC SUPPORT COMES FROM FORMER LIKUD VOTERS.

6. SMITH'S ROUGH ESTIMATE OF THE ELECTION RESULTS IN SEATS BASED ON HIS POLLS, HIS EXPERIENCE AND A BIT OF INTUITION:

ALIGNMENT	45-51
LIKUD	30-35
DMC	10-15
NRP	8
BOTH AGUDAH PARTIES	5
RAKAH	5-6
SHELI	2
UNITED ARAB LIST	2

HE DOES NOT SEE THE ILP, CIVIL RIGHTS, OR SHLOMZION
RECEIVING THE MINIMUM FOR ONE SEAT ALTHOUGH HE CONCEDED
THAT IF ONE OR MORE BENEFITTED ON THE HIGH SIDE FROM THE
.3 (POINT THREE) PER CENT INHERENT STATISTICAL ERROR,
THEY MIGHT REACH THE NECESSARY MINIMUM.

7. ACCORDING TO SMITH, THE ALIGNMENT'S SHOWING REFLECTS
THE INADEQUACY OF THE OPPOSITION. THE FACT THAT THE
DMC AND SHLOMZION STARTED OUT WITH SUCH A BANG LAST
FALL INDICATES THAT A SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL DOES EXIST
FOR AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE ALIGNMENT. HOWEVER, IN A
SHORT TIME THESE TWO PARTIES WERE PERCEIVED AS LACKING
THE QUALITIES REQUIRED TO ASSUME LEADERSHIP. YADIN IS
RUNNING BEHIND HIS PARTY, WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR ITS DECLINE
IN RECENT MONTHS. HE IS VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN AMONG THE
POOR, UNEDUCATED ISRAELIS AND HAS NOT COME ACROSS
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CONVINCINGLY AS PRIME MINISTER MATERIAL.

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8. AS FOR THE LIKUD, SMITH SAID THAT A LARGE PROPORTION OF THE ELECTORATE FINDS IT UNACCEPTABLE AS A PARTY TO GOVERN THE COUNTRY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ALIGNMENT IS SO ENTRENCHED IN ISRAEL'S INSTITUTIONS AND SO PERVASIVE IN ITS SOCIETY THAT IT AUTOMATICALLY COMMANDS THE SUPPORT OF A HEFTY CHUNK OF THE ELECTORATE. MOREOVER, IT HAS THE FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE GOING FOR IT, SINCE MOST ISRAELIS WOULD ACCEPT SOME TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE FOR PEACE. HOWEVER, HE THOUGHT THAT, AS IN ANY DEMOCRACY, BREAD AND BUTTER ISSUES ARE USUALLY DECISIVE. AND HERE, TOO, THE ALIGNMENT IS STRONGER THAN THE LIKUD. IN FACT, HE BELIEVES THAT PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO JUSTIFY THEIR INTENTION TO VOTE ALIGNMENT AND THAT THEY USUALLY GIVE ITS POSITION ON PEACE AS THEIR RATIONALE. SMITH CONCEDED THAT A FACTOR IN THE HIGH POLL RESULTS FOR THE ALIGNMENT MAY BE A FEAR BY SOME OF GOING ON RECORD OPPOSING THE PARTY IN POWER. HE HAS NO WAY OF MEASURING OR COMPENSATING FOR THIS FACTOR BUT BASED ON HIS SUCCESS IN 1973 HE BELIEVES THAT THE POSSIBLE ERROR IS INSIGNIFICANT. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE NOTED A HIGH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PROPORTION OF ISRAELIS ARE UNSOPHISTICATED ABOUT POLLS AND REGARD THE CANVASSER AS SOME SORT OF DISGUISED TAX COLLECTOR OR WORSE.

9. SMITH IS MYSTIFIED BY THE POOR SHOWING OF THE NRP IN THE POLLS. (ALL THREE RELIGIOUS PARTIES COMBINED RECEIVED SEVEN PER CENT IN HIS APRIL POLL.) HE SAID THAT THEY WERE UNDERESTIMATED IN 1973 AND HE BELIEVES THAT THE SAME PHENOMENON IS OCCURRING IN THIS CAMPAIGN. HIS SURVEYS DO NOT SUPPORT HIS ESTIMATE OF EIGHT SEATS FOR THE NRP, BUT HE DISTRUSTS THE POLL RESULTS FOR THIS PARTY. HE IS SURE THAT THE OTHER POLLS ALSO CRANK IN A DIVIDENT IN THEIR RESULTS FOR THE NRP. IN ADDITION TO THE HARDCORE OF "IRON SUPPORT" (THOSE THAT STATE THEIR PREFERENCE FORCEFULLY AND UNEQUIVOCALLY) FOR THE NRP, SMITH BELIEVES THAT THERE ARE MANY RELIGIOUS ISRAELIS WHO VOTE FOR THE PARTY BUT SHY AWAY FROM SAYING SO BEFOREHAND. (COMMENT: PERHAPS BECAUSE THE BULK OF THE UNSOPHISTICATED VOTERS NOTED ABOVE ARE RELIGIOUS.)

10. HE FOUND THAT MOST RAKAH VOTERS ARE OF THE "IRON SUPPORT" VARIETY. THE PARTY HAS A SOLID 3.5 PER CENT. A HEAVY MAJORITY OF VOTERS IN THE ARAB TOWNS (RANGING FROM 60-80 PER CENT) PREFER RAKAH. TO WIN THE SEVEN OR EIGHT SEATS MOST OBSERVERS HAVE BEEN CONCEDING THEM, RAKAH WOULD REQUIRE NEAR UNANIMOUS SUPPORT IN THE LARGER ARAB TOWNS SINCE THE TINY ARAB VILLAGES NEAR JEWISH SETTLEMENTS (AS WELL AS THE DRUZE AND BEDOUINS) VOTE ALIGNMENT,

DMC OR THE UNITED ARAB LIST. (A MERE 3,000 JEWS VOTED FOR RAKAH IN 1973. SMITH THOUGHT THIS COULD INCREASE BY TEN PER CENT AT MOST.)

11. SMITH SAID THAT SHELI, DESPITE ITS BLACK PANTHER COMPONENT, HAS LITTLE SUPPORT AMONG THE POOR. LIKE THE DMC, IT IS ESSENTIALLY A PARTY OF INTELLECTUALS -- MAINLY THE YOUNGER ONES. HE CONSIDERED HIS ESTIMATE OF TWO SEATS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FOR SHELI ON THE GENEROUS SIDE.

12. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH COMPARED TO OTHER POLLS SMITH'S RESULTS FOR THE ALIGNMENT HAVE BEEN ON THE HIGH SIDE (HE EXPECTS HIS LAST POLL TO SHOW SOME EROSION IN ALIGNMENT SUPPORT), WE TEND TO ACCEPT THE THRUST OF HIS ESTIMATES. SMITH, WHO SAYS HIS FEES BARELY COVER HIS EXPENSES, OBVIOUSLY ENJOYS HIS "HOBBY". HE IS HIGHLY REGARDED IN HIS FIELD AND IS RATED AS ONE OF THE MOST ASTUTE OBSERVERS OF THE ELECTION SCENE.

13. SUMMING UP, HE IS SAYING THAT THE ISRAELI ELECTORATE HAS REACHED MIDDLE AGE. THE ZIONIST IDEALISM OF PREVIOUS YEARS IS GIVING WAY TO PRAGMATISM AND IMMEDIATE CONCERNS. THE ALIGNMENT WILL WIN BY DEFAULT BECAUSE IT IS "SAFE" AND FAMILIAR AND A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE HAS YET TO MATERIALIZE.
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